DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 158 452 EC 111 311

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TITLE Recognition of Team Goals: An Essential Step Toward Rational Decision Making.
INSTITUTION Connecticut State Dept. of Education, Hartford. Bureau of Pupil Personnel and Special Education Services.
SPONS AGENCY Bureau of Education for the Handicapped (DHEW/OE), Washington, D.C. Div. of Innovation and Development.
PUB DATE [76]
NOTE 17p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cooperative Planning; Decision Making; Elementary Secondary Education; Exceptional Child Research; *Handicapped Children; *Interdisciplinary Approach; Legal Responsibility; *Student Placement; *Teamwork

ABSTRACT

Examined with the placement teams of 230 handicapped students was the assumption that pupil programming team members drawn from the spectrum of school staffing hierarchy will agree on the goals of the team or be fully knowledgeable about the team's legally assigned responsibilities. Over 60% of the teams surveyed had less that a 3/4 majority of their members who recognized the team's responsibility to make specific decision. More administrators and support personnel recognized team responsibilities than do instructional personnel. (Administrative remedies are considered.) (Author/SBH)

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ED158452

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# RECOGNITION OF TEAM GOALS: AN ESSENTIAL STEP TOWARD RATIONAL DECISION MAKING

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EC111311

This report was prepared by the U.S. Office of Education, Bureau of Education for the Handicapped, Division of Innovation & Development, State Program Studies Branch in cooperation with the Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Pupil Personnel and Special Educational Services.

Abstract

The assumption that pupil programming team members drawn from the spectrum of school staffing hierarchy will agree on the goals of the team or be fully knowledgeable about the team's legally assigned responsibilities was examined. Over sixty percent of the teams surveyed had less than a three-fourths majority of their members who recognized the team's responsibility to make specific decisions. Furthermore, the MANOVA for role differences was significant for overall recognition of these responsibilities ($p < .0001$). More administrators and support personnel recognize team responsibilities than do instructional personnel. The authors consider administrative remedies.

School personnel are required by P.L. 94-142 to come together as a multidisciplinary program or placement team (PT) including administrative, instructional, and support personnel to make decisions on a case-by-case basis for the delivery of special services to educationally handicapped students. PT procedures are governed by due process obligations to ensure that the resulting decisions are rational and not arbitrary. In most theories of rational decision making, it is assumed that team members agree with organizational goals; thus the consequences of members being unaware of organizational goals or having different interpretations of what the goals are have largely been ignored (March & Simon, 1958). But is it reasonable to assume that team members who may be drawn from the full spectre of the school staffing hierarchy will agree on the purposes or goals of the team or be fully knowledgeable about the teams' legally assigned functions? This paper will explore PT goals as perceived by PT members who represent ten school staff roles from the three mandated subgroups of administrative, instructional and support personnel.

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Thanks are due to Clay Steinberger and Robert Margolin, Connecticut State Department of Education; Susan Samsor, Ann Mabry, Steve Lansdowne, Betty Corbitt, and Joan Stoddard for their assistance in data collection and Beth Randall and Barbara Hobbs for their assistance in the preparation and typing of this manuscript.

Goal clarity in group decision making has operational implications for the PT. First, because the formal organizational goals of the PT provide the basis for a rational decision-making process, failure to recognize assigned goals is likely to be accompanied by failure to attend to the activities necessary for making appropriate placement decisions. Second, decision processes will be orderly, efficient, and relatively fast-paced to the extent that members uniformly understand district expectations and goals since agreement about goals enables group members to focus their efforts collectively and allot some attention to each task. Incongruent perception of goals among group members frequently results in ineffective behaviors such as time spent in discussion of matters disproportionate to their impact on the decision, nit picking, theoretical or abstract meanderings, and anecdotal tangents (Schmuck, Runkel, Saturen, Mortell, & Derr, 1972).

March and Simon theorized that "... the greater the clarity of goals associated with an activity, the greater the tendency (for the group) to engage in it" (p. 185). When goals are explicit, it is easier to attach rewards and penalties to the behavior necessary for achieving them, thereby making it easier to exert administrative and social pressure on individual members to conform to group goals. It would seem that if responsibilities are clearly known and understood by the PT members, the assigned and expected organizational goals of the committee are more likely to be fulfilled. Considering the possible

influence of various PT members' roles on team behavior, members' perceptions of PT duties by role become significant for the potential impact they have in determining team behavior. For example, it is particularly important for the principal, who often acts as chairperson for the PT meeting,[1] to have a clear idea about what tasks constitute PT goals and responsibilities, since as the team leader he has the power to control the agenda and influence team behavior.

Therefore, since congruent perception of goals facilitates group interaction, an analysis of goal consensus among PT members was undertaken to identify goals in need of clarification. The purposes of this study are (a) to determine if the PTs as a unit recognize the duties which have been assigned to them by the state and (b) to identify which PT members by role recognize the organizational goals for the placement team.

## METHOD

### Subjects and Sampling Design

All public senior (n=165) and junior (n=136) high schools and a random sample of one third of the elementary schools (n=121) in Connecticut were selected as the initial pool for the study. More than one half of the schools (53.6%, senior high; 57.0%, junior high; 52.9%, elementary) agreed to participate. From each school's list of handicapped students who began receiving special services in the 1975-76 school year, one student was randomly selected; 8% were EMR; 55%, LD; and 37%, S&E. The members of each student's PT were identified, and a questionnaire was mailed to the school personnel on each team. Out of 1,536 questionnaires mailed, 1,478

1/ In this study, principals acted as chairpersons in 179 of the 230 participating committees.

or 96% were completed and returned by members of 230 PTs. (In 179 PTs, all of the team members returned their survey.) Some members served on more than one placement team, and for these members only one response was allowed. Thus, the final sample for this study consisted of 1,428 PT members. The number of subjects categorized by role was as follows:

Central administrative personnel (n=60) -- Directors, coordinators, supervisors, or pupil personnel and/or special education personnel who are responsible for district-wide special education programs;
Principals (n=231) -- Principals, assistant principals, or other school building administrators such as deans;
School psychologists (n=155) -- State-credentialed school psychologists or psychometrists;
School social workers (n=128);
School counselors (n=203);
Speech and hearing clinicians (n=48);
Reading consultants (n=69) -- Teachers or program heads of Title I projects or special reading teachers;
Medical personnel (n=73) -- Licensed medical doctors or school nurses;
Special education teachers (n=245) -- Teachers of the handicapped in a self-contained, resource, or itinerant capacity;
Regular education teachers (n=216) -- Elementary or secondary teachers and department heads from Grades K through 12.

Procedure

This study used items from the questionnaire which required PT members to indicate the goals they perceived as PT responsiblities from a list of 11 possible goals. All items were drawn directly from the Connecticut Department of Education's regulations stipulating PT responsibilities. These goals are consistent with the intent of PL 94-142. For each goal listed below, respondents chose whether they felt their PT should (a) offer suggestions, (b) make final decisions, or (c) do nothing because the activity was not a PT responsibility. After each item an abbreviated phrase is provided which will be used to represent the item throughout the paper.

Goals

1. Determining the student's eligibility for special education. (Determine eligibility)
2. Determining whether sufficient types of information about the student are available to the PT before making decisions affecting the student's

instructional program. (Determine the adequacy of information)
3. Evaluating the educational significance of such data. (Interpret information)
4. Determining student placement. (Determine placement)
5. Formulating appropriate year-long educational goals and objectives for the student. (Formulate long-term goals)
6. Developing specific short-term instructional objectives for the student. (Develop short-term objectives)
7. Communicating with parents about changes in the student's educational program. (Communicate with parents)
8. Planning information needed for future review of the student's program and progress. (Determine criteria for review)
9. Establishing the specific date for PT review. (Establish review date)
10. Reviewing the continued appropriateness of the student's educational program. (Review appropriateness of program)
11. Reviewing the student's educational progress. (Review progress)

Data Analysis

To determine whether each PT as a unit recognized the PT's responsibility to make final decisions for each goal, a group score for each item was obtained as follows. A positive score of 1 was assigned to each PT member who indicated that the PT's responsibility was to make final decisions concerning a given goal. PTs were then assigned to one of three categories according to the percentage of their PT members who recognized that the goal was to make a final decision: (a) Non-cognizant- defined as less than 50% of the team members responding affirmatively, (b) Ambiguous - defined as 50-74% of the team members responding affirmatively, and (c) Cognizant - defined as 75% or more of the team members responding affirmatively.

To describe role differences in recognition of the state's organizational goals for the PT, the percentage of members of each role who recognized a goal was obtained. A 10 (Roles of PT members) x 11 (PT Goals) multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed to test the hypothesis of no overall role differences for recognition of goals. The MANOVA is a general linear procedure which yields an eta-square ($\eta^2$) indicating the relationship between two sets of variables when there is more than one uncorrelated relationship between the sets (Cooley & Lohnes, 1971). To identify which roles differed in recognition of goals, t-tests were performed between the role means and the total mean for each goal.

The data were analyzed using the SAS Institute's general linear model procedure (Barr, Goodnight, Sall & Helwig, 1976). An alpha level of .05 was adopted to test the significance of each statistical hypothesis.

## RESULTS

### Recognition of Responsibilities by Role Members

Team recognition of the state-defined PT responsibility to make decisions for each goal is shown in Table 1. The percentage of teams cognizant of PT responsibilities ranged from a high of 37% to a low of 11% across goals. About one-third of the PTs were cognizant of responsibilities related to goal-setting, placement decisions, and program appropriateness. Only about one-fourth of the PTs were cognizant of responsibilities concerning eligibility, diagnosis, and subsequent evaluation. Thus, less than 40% of the PTS had a three-fourths majority who recognized their responsibility to make the specified decisions.

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INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE
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### Recognition of Responsibilities by Role Members

The relationship between roles and recognition was moderate and positive with 23% of the variance in recognition accounted for by role. The MANOVA for role was significant for overall recognition of PT responsibilities ($p < .0001$). The following statistics for each recognition variable (goal) are presented in Table 2: the total mean, the standard deviation, the $R^2$ or variance explained

by role, and the role means significantly different from the total mean.

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INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE
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Administrators (central administrators and principals) had the highest cognizance of all PT responsibilities; their mean for all responsibilities was 73%. Support personnel were not significantly different than administrators; their mean for all activities was 71%. However, instructional staff (regular classroom teachers, reading consultants, and special education teachers) had a significantly lower recognition of PT responsibilities; their mean was 65%. It should be noted that the special education teacher mean was 70%, similar to the mean of support personnel. The difference for instructional staff was due to the mean of regular classroom teachers (59%).

The activities which were most frequently recognized as PT responsibilities by PT members concern eligibility, the adequacy of the case data, the student's placement, the review date, and program review (see Table 2). An average of 79% of the administrators, support personnel, and special education teachers recognized these activities as PT responsibilities, in contrast to 65% of the regular education teachers. Responsibilities related to progress review, educational diagnosis, and communication with parents were recognized by 72% of the administrators, support personnel, and special education teachers but only 57% of the regular education teachers. The least recognized responsibilities were those which were prescriptive in nature: establishing long-term goals for the student, developing short-term instructional objectives, and determining criteria for review of the student's progress. For these prescriptive activities, the mean percentage for administrators was 61%; followed by support personnel, 58%; special education teachers, 55%; and finally, regular education teachers, 49%. In summary, if administrators had a high recognition rate for a given activity, other PT members were likely to be relatively high for the same activity. Likewise, activities recognized by a lesser percentage of administrators

were generally recognized by fewer members of the other roles.

## DISCUSSION

From the data obtained in this study, it is clear that (a) not all PTs have an accurate idea about the scope of PT responsibilities, and (b) PT members recognize duties differently according to their roles; specifically, more administrators and support personnel recognize the official PT duties than do regular education teachers.

### Perception of Responsibilities by Team

PT members' awareness of the PT's organizational goals must be the first step in ensuring that educational programming decisions are appropriate because these basic activities outline a conceptual framework for the decision-making process. PT members who have an accurate goal orientation are motivated to incorporate these activites into their own decision-making procedures.

Internalization of goals is partially dependent on the extent to which the goals are operational. That is, the more concrete and visible the goals are, the more group members will recognize them and see the completion of these goals as a measure of group success (Katz & Kahn, 1966). To make goals more observable, administrative devices can be used such as having the leader summarize the PT's decisions relating to each state-defined duty as they are made, using an agenda which lists each PT duty as a topic or rotating the role of PT recorder among members so that each has a turn at keeping a written record of the PT decisions related to each PT responsibility.

Organizational goals can also become important to the PT as a way to justify requests for resources and increase the likelihood that the resources will be provided by the organization. As resources are secured, members are rewarded for recognizing the organizational goals, and the organizational goals are seen as

serving the needs of members. For example, teachers may ultimately desire time to develop a competency-based curriculum. They can use the PT goal concerning the development of short-term instructional goals for each special education student as further justification to seek a share of the school's limited resources. Furthermore, when goals are visible and the results of goal attainment become observable, the goals can be used as the criteria for evaluating the group process in the future. For instance, suppose PT members do not feel that students are reviewed frequently enough. If the PT begins to set review dates when initial programming decisions are made, the criteria for determining the length of time between reviews can be modified until most members are satisfied that the reviews are timely.

Perception of Responsibility by Role

The present study found that the goal perception of the PTs was different from the goal statement for PTs found in written documents of the state educational agency. Moreover, there was noticeable disagreement about the PT's duties among members within PTs. It can be argued that this later observation has more serious implications for the PT. It suggests that PTs may have difficulty getting members to function as a unit. If PTs ignore some state-defined tasks but agree about the remaining PT goals, members are likely to work collectively to achieve the agreed-upon goals. However, if PT members disagree among themselves as well as with the state guidelines or PL 94-142 regulations, group functioning will be impeded.

Common perception of goals is affected in part by the reference group which members identify with when functioning as a group. Do members perceive themselves

as administrators, support personnel, and instructors over and above being PT members? The data suggest subgroup identification based on proximity to the special education communication network. The more strongly members identify with subgroups, the greater the likelihood that their goals are differentiated. However, Delbecq (1965) found in his research with small groups that group members can be led to identify with a new reference if before the meeting members are given explicit instruction for temporarily changing their role definitions and a legitimate rationale for making the change.

The communication network of the PT and the larger special education organization of the district also potentially affect members' goal consensus. According to Katz and Kahn (1966), if group members have access to differing amounts and kinds of information, they are likely to perceive goals differently when they participate in joint decision-making activities. In contrast, access to the same information can increase common goal perceptions. The data from this study appear to be reflecting the position in the special education communication chain occupied by a given role, that is, members who were in roles that have less direct contact with the special education communication network were less informed about the state-defined PT duties. A change in district level communication procedures may be necessary to eliminate the difference in goal perception between the administrators, support personnel, and instructional staff.

Although there was a significant difference by the role for perceptions of PT responsibilities, the direction of the fluctuation in recognition rate was similar across roles. Since deficiencies occur in the same areas across roles, it is not necessary to tailor an inservice training program to the needs of each role separately. The areas of responsibility found to be particularly deficient

across roles were those activities related to implementation such as programming and ongoing evaluation. Since the purpose of the PT assessment process is to determine the specific program that is appropriate for the referred student, a thorough diagnosis without a prescription for remedial action leaves the job unfinished. Public Laws 93-380 and 94-142 both require states to provide safeguards in decision making related to the development of the student's educational plan. If all programming responsibility is relinquished by default to the teacher or teachers who receive the exceptional student, then what safeguard does the system provide to ensure the appropriateness of the program? Likewise, the activities concerned with ongoing evaluation such as setting evaluation criteria, establishing a timetable for review, and communicating with the student's parents are necessary for PTs to ensure that their decisions are implemented and that they have the desired effect. Agreed-upon standards provide the PT with a basis for making decisions about the continuation of a student's program. Further, school-parent communication is improved by using these stated criteria as a common basis for evaluating the child's progress and the program's continued appropriateness.

## Conclusion

PT members are neither fully aware of, nor in agreement about, their PT duties. As an end-state, complete and continual operationalization of official PT goals remains a professional ideal; nevertheless, some of the conditions necessary to bring the ideal to reality are known. They include an increased awareness of the goals as desired outcomes, an understanding of the consequences of attaining or failing to attain each goal, and a willingness to maintain the internalization of the ideal goals by periodic review of members' perceptions of PT responsibilities.

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Percentage of PTs That Recognize Assigned PT Duties

| Duty | Percent of PTs | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Incongruent | Ambiguous | Congruent |
| Formulate long-term goals | 8 | 55 | 37 |
| Develop short-term objectives | 8 | 56 | 36 |
| Determine placement | 12 | 56 | 32 |
| Review appropriateness of program | 10 | 58 | 32 |
| Interpret information | 12 | 61 | 27 |
| Review progress | 16 | 57 | 27 |
| Determine adequacy of information | 14 | 60 | 26 |
| Determine eligibility | 11 | 64 | 25 |
| Establish review date | 17 | 61 | 22 |
| Communicate with parents | 15 | 64 | 21 |
| Determine criteria for review | 30 | 59 | 11 |

Note. Incongruent = less than 50% of the committee members agreed with the state-defined duty, ambiguous = 50 - 74% of the committee members agreed, and congruent = 75% or better of the members agreed.

Total Mean, Standard Deviation, $R^2$ and Role Means

for Recognition of Eleven PT Responsibilities

| Goals | Total Mean | SD | $R^2$ | Role Means | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Central Administrators | Principals | School Psychologists | School Social Workers | School Counselors | Speech & Hearing Clinicians | Medical Personnel | Special Education Teacher | Reading Consultant | Regular Education Teachers |
| Determine eligibility | .79 | .40 | .023 | .89 | .76 | .86 | .77 | .81 | .78 | .78 | .86 | .74 | .68* |
| Determine adequacy of information | .75 | .43 | .023 | .84 | .76 | .78 | .77 | .77 | .79 | .74 | .79 | .74 | .59* |
| Interpret information | .72 | .44 | .021 | .80 | .76 | .77 | .74 | .74 | .65 | .70 | .76 | .67 | .58* |
| Determine placement | .77 | .41 | .024 | .75 | .78 | .83* | .75 | .83 | .71 | .72 | .84* | .69 | .66* |
| Formulate long-term Goals | .57 | .49 | NS | .63 | .63* | .58 | .62 | .56 | .52 | .61 | .56 | .53 | .47* |
| Develop short-term objectives | .50 | .50 | .027 | .48 | .61* | .46 | .45 | .52 | .44* | .74* | .44* | .53 | .44* |
| Communicate with parents | .68 | .46 | .016 | .66 | .72 | .67 | .74 | .71 | .75 | .64 | .71 | .61 | .56* |
| Determine criteria for review | .62 | .48 | NS | .64 | .64 | .61 | .70* | .63 | .62 | .65 | .64 | .60 | .55 |
| Establish review date | .77 | .42 | .013 | .68 | .77 | .82 | .78 | .75 | .83 | .89 | .79 | .77 | .70 |
| Review appropriateness of program | .74 | .43 | .022 | .88* | .75 | .78 | .81* | .74 | .80 | .77 | .73 | .74 | .60* |
| Review progress | .68 | .46 | .020 | .79 | .74 | .67 | .77* | .66 | .72 | .74 | .70 | .62 | .56* |

Note: All $R^2$s and starred (*) Role Means are significant at $p < .05$.